

Story 1793 (1991 Tape 5)

Narrator: Eşref Hakan
Özcan, 26

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Transformation of a Drinker

Neyzen Tevfik¹ was known to be a very heavy drinker. One night he was at a certain bar with some of his friends. After a while it became obvious that he had again drunk too much. Neyzen Tevfik was angry at himself for having done this, and he said, "I am not going to come to this bar again. May I turn into an Arab before I come here again!"

On the following night all of his friends gathered again at that same bar. Soon they saw approaching someone they did not at first recognize. It was Neyzen Tevfik, who had painted his face black.²

¹Neyzen Tevfik was born near Bodrum in 1878 and died in İstanbul in 1953. He was called Neyzen because he played the ney, a deep-toned wind instrument. After surnames were required by the Kemalist Reforms of the 1920s, his family took the name Kolaylı. However, he continued to be known only as Neyzen Tevfik--even in the Turkish encyclopaedias. An alcoholic in real life as well as in folktales, he was a poet who produced several volumes, among them Hiç (1919) and Azâb-ı Mukaddes (1949).

²Until it is explained, this anecdote is amusing only to Turkish people. Although they know full well that Arabs are usually not Negroes, Turks frequently picture them as such in their folktales, where black and Arab are often synonymous. These imaginary Arabs in Turkish folktales are sometimes given decidedly Negroid facial features.